

oligonucleotides for specific cleavage of the 5' arm (of the oligo on bead 1) by the DNAPs of the present invention (not shown in Figure 1A).

The site of cleavage (indicated by a large solid arrowhead) is controlled by the distance between the 3' end of the "primer" and the downstream fork of the oligo on bead 1. The latter is designed with an uncleavable region (indicated by the striping). In this manner neither oligonucleotide is subject to cleavage when misaligned or when unattached to target nucleic acid.

Successful cleavage releases a single copy of what is referred to as the alpha signal oligo. This oligo may contain a detectable moiety (*e.g.*, fluorescein). On the other hand, it may be unlabelled.

In one embodiment of the detection method, two more oligonucleotides are provided on solid supports. The oligonucleotide shown in Figure 1A on bead 2 has a region that is complementary to the alpha signal oligo (indicated as alpha prime) allowing for hybridization. This structure can be cleaved by the DNAPs of the present invention to release the beta signal oligo. The beta signal oligo can then hybridize to type 3 beads having an oligo with a complementary region (indicated as beta prime). Again, this structure can be cleaved by the DNAPs of the present invention to release a new alpha oligo.

At this point, the amplification has been linear. To increase the power of the method, it is desired that the alpha signal oligo hybridized to bead type 2 be liberated after release of the beta oligo so that it may go on to hybridize with other oligos on type 2 beads. Similarly, after release of an alpha oligo from type 3 beads, it is desired that the beta oligo be liberated.

The liberation of "captured" signal oligos can be achieved in a number of ways. First, it has been found that the DNAPs of the present invention have a true 5' exonuclease capable of "nibbling" the 5' end of the alpha (and beta) prime oligo (discussed below in more detail). Thus, under appropriate conditions, the hybridization is destabilized by nibbling of the DNAP. Second, the alpha - alpha prime (as well as the beta - beta prime) complex can be destabilized by heat (*e.g.*, thermal cycling).

With the liberation of signal oligos by such techniques, each cleavage results in a doubling of the number of signal oligos. In this manner, detectable signal can quickly be achieved.

Figure 1B provides a schematic of a second embodiment of the detection method of the present invention. Again, the target sequence is recognized by two distinct oligonucleotides in the triggering or trigger reaction and the target nucleic acid aligns the two oligonucleotides for specific cleavage of the 5' arm by the DNAPs of the present invention (not shown in Figure 1B). The first oligo is completely complementary to a portion of the target sequence. The second oligonucleotide is partially complementary to the target sequence; the 3' end of the second oligonucleotide is fully complementary to the target sequence while the 5' end is non-complementary and forms a single-stranded arm. The non-complementary end of the second oligonucleotide may be a generic sequence which can be used with a set of standard hairpin structures (described below). The detection of different target sequences would require unique portions of two oligonucleotides: the entire first oligonucleotide and the 3' end of the second oligonucleotide. The 5' arm of the second oligonucleotide can be invariant or generic in sequence.

The annealing of the first and second oligonucleotides near one another along the target sequence forms a forked cleavage structure which is a substrate for the 5' nuclease of DNA polymerases. The approximate location of the cleavage site is again indicated by the large solid arrowhead in Figure 1B.

The 5' nucleases of the invention are capable of cleaving this structure but are not capable of polymerizing the extension of the 3' end of the first oligonucleotide. The lack of polymerization activity is advantageous as extension of the first oligonucleotide results in displacement of the annealed region of the second oligonucleotide and results in moving the site of cleavage along the second oligonucleotide. If polymerization is allowed to occur to any significant amount, multiple lengths of cleavage product will be generated. A single cleavage product of uniform length is desirable as this cleavage product initiates the detection reaction.

The trigger reaction may be run under conditions that allow for thermocycling. Thermocycling of the reaction allows for a logarithmic increase in the amount of the trigger oligonucleotide released in the reaction.

5 The second part of the detection method allows the annealing of the fragment of the second oligonucleotide liberated by the cleavage of the first cleavage structure formed in the triggering reaction (called the third or trigger oligonucleotide) to a first hairpin structure. This first hairpin structure has a single-stranded 5' arm and a single-stranded 3' arm. The third oligonucleotide triggers the cleavage of this first hairpin structure by annealing to the 3' arm of the hairpin thereby forming a substrate for cleavage by the 5' nuclease of the present invention. The cleavage of this first hairpin structure generates two reaction products: 1) the cleaved 5' arm of the hairpin called the fourth oligonucleotide, and 2) the cleaved hairpin structure which now lacks the 5' arm and is smaller in size than the uncleaved hairpin. This cleaved first hairpin may be used as a detection molecule to indicate that cleavage directed by the trigger or third oligonucleotide occurred. Thus, this indicates that the first two oligonucleotides found and annealed to the target sequence thereby indicating the presence of the target sequence in the sample.

10 The detection products are amplified by having the fourth oligonucleotide anneal to a second hairpin structure. This hairpin structure has a 5' single-stranded arm and a 3' single-stranded arm. The fourth oligonucleotide generated by cleavage of the first hairpin structure anneals to the 3' arm of the second hairpin structure thereby creating a third cleavage structure recognized by the 5' nuclease. The cleavage of this second hairpin structure also generates two reaction products: 1) the cleaved 5' arm of the hairpin called the fifth oligonucleotide which is similar or identical in sequence to the third nucleotide, and 2) the cleaved second hairpin structure which now lacks the 5' arm and is smaller in size than the uncleaved hairpin. This cleaved second hairpin may be as a detection molecule and amplifies the signal generated by the cleavage of the first hairpin structure. Simultaneously with the annealing of the forth oligonucleotide, the third oligonucleotide is dissociated from the cleaved first hairpin molecule so that it is free to anneal to a new copy of the first hairpin structure. The